

Historical Note on the Representations of Sultan Adam Khan

Sultan Adam Khan is a major figure in the history of the Indian subcontinent. He was a firm ally of three Mughal emperors i.e. Babur, Humayun, and Akbar, and as a foe fought another one (Islam Shah) from the rival Sur dynasty to a standstill. At the height of his power, he minted his own coins and entertained emperor Humayun at Pharwala where he delivered prince Kamran Mirza to Humayun, the rebellious half-brother of the emperor, who had been effectively detained by the Sultan by employing a prudent stratagem [1, 2]. In my search for locating representations of Sultan Adam Khan in Mughal era literature, I have come across three miniature paintings, which are included below followed by brief descriptions.

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1

In the painting labeled 1 above, Sultan Adam Khan pays allegiance to the emperor Akbar (1542-1605) at Lahore in 1557 [3]. He was persuaded to submit in person to the emperor but requested that he may be excused from service away from his own lands, which was allowed by the young Akbar [4]. At this event a quarrel was settled between Sultan Adam and his nephew, Kamal Khan, a prominent mansabdar and son of the slain Gakkhar chief Sultan Sarang Khan [5]. Sultan Adam Khan was the younger brother of Sultan Sarang and the settlement most likely concerned with the right of ownership of the Gakkhar country. In this painting, Sultan Adam Khan has been identified as the person (top-center-left) standing behind the individual with clasped hands before Akbar, awaiting his introduction to the emperor [6]. This painting is presently in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

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2



In the painting labeled 2 above, the Mughal army fights and defeats Gakkhars under the command of Sultan Adam Khan and his son Lashkari in 1562-63. In this painting, Sultan Adam is the central figure in full battle attire with arms bent backwards. He has surrendered to the nobles leading the attacking army and is being put in chains by a foot soldier [7]. This painting is currently in the collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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3

In the painting labeled 3 above, Sultan Adam Khan is the bareheaded and disheveled individual with hands in cuffs (center-left) [8]. He is being brought before the mounted nobles leading the Mughal Army as a captive by four foot soldiers. This painting is presently in the collection of Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.

It is worth noting here that all of the above paintings were at one time part of multiple illustrated copies of the Akbarnama. The last two paintings refer to the same event i.e. the overthrow of the Sultan as he refused to submit to the royal decree of dividing Gakkhar territory between him and his nephew Kamal Khan. These illustrated copies of the Akbarnama were included in the collections of the royal libraries of various Mughal emperors. At some point in history, after the fall of the Mughal empire, they were acquired by private individuals and after being handed over from one owner to another, came into the possession of the current holders [3, 6, 8].

The painting labeled as 2 above was once part of a copy of the Akbarnama thought to have been illustrated during the years 1592-1595 [7]. This particular copy of the Akbarnama is the first one ever illustrated and was retained in the private collection of the emperor Akbar. He would have sifted through its folios to see the key events of his reign being immortalized in miniature paintings. Akbar had met Sultan Adam Khan multiple times including the instance when Sultan Adam hosted his father, emperor Humayun and his royal entourage on the banks of the river Soan in full view of the Pharwala fort [2]. Akbar would have recognized him right away and it is probable that this representation of Sultan Adam is the most likely one.

References

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3. Ann Gallbaly, *The Collections of the National Gallery of Victoria*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1987.
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5. Abdul Qadir Al-Badaoni (W. H. Lowe, Trans.), *Muntakhabu-t-Tawarikh*, Vol. 2, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1899 (Reprint: Delhi, 1973).
6. John Guy, "Mughal Painting under Akbar: the Melbourne Hamza-nama and Akbar-nama Paintings", *Art Bulletin of Victoria*, Vol. 22, 2014, pp. 1-11.
7. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O9732/sultan-adam-painting-tulsi/> (Retrieved on 25th April, 2024.)
8. Linda York Leach, *Mughal and other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library*, Vol. 1, Scorpion Cavendish, London, 1995.

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